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G/TIP FOR G-LAURA PENA, INL, DRL, PRM, AF/RSA

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TAGS: [KTIP](#) [ELAB](#) [MCA](#) [PHUM](#) [KCRM](#) [KWMN](#) [SMIG](#) [KFRD](#) [ASEC](#)
PREF, MR
SUBJECT: MAURITANIA: TENTH ANNUAL TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS
(TIP) REPORT

REF: A. 10STATE 2094
[1](#)B. 09NOUAKCHOTT718
[1](#)C. 09NOUAKCHOTT711
[1](#)D. 09NOUAKCHOTT255
[1](#)E. 09NOUAKCHOTT486
[1](#)F. 09NOUAKCHOTT512

[1](#)1. (SBU) In response to Ref A, please find post's TIP
report submission:

TIP SITUATION

[1](#)2. (SBU) Sources of Available Information: Available information on human trafficking is limited and unreliable. Although evidence points to the existence of many forms of human trafficking, such as prostitution networks, trafficking in illegal migrants, and the trafficking of girls and women to Saudi Arabia; little is known about how these networks operate or the number of victims. There is no official or centralized data on trafficking and the information available, gathered by NGOs, is insufficient. In 2009, the Ministry of Social Affairs, Childhood, and Women in collaboration with UNICEF worked on a study on "Child Trafficking and the Worst Forms of Labor in Mauritania," which was released to the public in January 2010. The UNICEF study on the Situation of Women and Children in Mauritania (MICS), published in 2007, has some information about child-labor and forced labor. Special Rapporteur on Modern Forms of Slavery Gulnara Shahinian visited Mauritania in November 2009 and will release her report to the UN Assembly in 2010. Post has slated funds to finance in 2010 the first baseline study on slavery among women and children, which will be conducted by UNICEF.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Country Situation: In Mauritania, women, men and children from traditional slave castes may be subject to slavery-related practices, rooted in ancestral master-slave relationships, which continue to exist in both rural and urban settings (Ref B and C). These individuals, associated for generations to slave-holding families, work as house help and cattle herders without pay. Mauritanian and West African boys (referred to as "talibe") are trafficked within and into the country often in order to beg for religious teachers. Girls have been trafficked internally and from neighboring West African countries such as Mali, Senegal and The Gambia for domestic servitude. Mauritanian girls have been married off to wealthy Saudi men and trafficked to Saudi Arabia for sexual servitude and prostitution (Ref D). Women and girls are trafficked within and into the country as prostitutes. Illegal migrants from West African countries are often trafficked into Mauritania by networks profiting from their passage to Europe.

14. (SBU) Vulnerability to TIP: Talibe boys employed in forced begging live in harsh conditions and do not attend school. They have to bring the proceeds of their begging to their imam and are not provided any food, having to beg for food scraps. They often sleep in the streets at night and may be victims of physical and sexual abuse. Women and girls in domestic servitude live in modern slavery conditions -- they may be exploited, sexually abused and have their meager salaries withheld or paid to a third party such as their families or an intermediary. Slaves may work long hours without pay and cattle herders live in particularly harsh conditions and are prone to physical abuse. Slave families are often separated to be distributed among different households pertaining to the same slave-owning family. Slave children often do not attend school and little girls may work long hours as domestic servants and nannies. Many slaves do not have birth certificates or national identity papers. Girls trafficked to Saudi Arabia through arranged marriages are sometimes used as sex slaves or prostitutes.

15. (SBU) Conditions: Men, women and children from traditional slave castes both in the Black Moor (Haratine) and Afro-Mauritanian communities are subject to slavery-like practices. They have been associated to their master's family for generations and are considered "part of the family." Many of them, including children, are exploited and work without pay. Among this group, women and girls are particularly at risk. Those working as herders are most vulnerable to ill treatment and harsh conditions. Puular boys from poor families are most vulnerable to forced begging. Girls from poor families are at risk of being married off to wealthy Saudi men and trafficked to Saudi Arabia as sex slaves. Girls and women from West African (TIP) REPORT

countries and from the southern regions of Mauritania are vulnerable to domestic servitude, exploitation and prostitution.

16. (SBU) Traffickers and Their Methods: Talibe boys are often trafficked by unscrupulous imams. Poor families place their boys with these imams, who are supposed to provide them an education. Nevertheless, the families cannot afford to pay for the boys' upkeep and the boys are forced to beg -- both to eat and to give the proceeds to their imam. There are reports of imams trafficking boys from Guinea, Mali and Senegal into Mauritania. Girls and women are trafficked to Saudi Arabia by networks of marriage brokers and travel agencies. Marriage brokers often persuade poor families to accept an arranged marriage with a Saudi man in exchange for hefty bride price. Then, travel agencies make arrangements for the girls' travel to Saudi Arabia, including passport and visas. Once in Saudi Arabia, the girls may be used as sex slaves or prostitutes. Individuals issued from slave castes and associated to their master's families for generations often work without remuneration in conditions of exploitation. Girls and women in domestic servitude may be "placed" in a household by their families. In the case of West African girls and women, it is often a national of their country living in Mauritania who serves as intermediary between families in need of house help and families seeking to "place" their daughters. The families or the intermediaries often receive the girls' salaries. Prostitution networks are managed by foreign women who lure young women into the prostitution business and arrange encounters with clients. West Africans living in Mauritania arrange for illegal migrants from their countries to reach Mauritania with the purpose of crossing over to Europe.

SETTING THE SCENE FOR THE GOVERNMENT'S ANTI-TIP

17. (SBU) The government acknowledges trafficking is a problem. The Ministry of Social Affairs, Childhood and Family drafted in collaboration with UNICEF a National Strategy for the Protection of Children in Mauritania, which

comprises an action plan for 2009-2010 that addresses the problem of children victims of trafficking. The government is currently working in association with the International Organization for the Right to Development (IDDL0) to draft a National Action Plan to Fight Trafficking in Persons to be released in 2010. However, despite its acknowledgment of trafficking as a problem, the government is still reluctant to acknowledge slavery currently exists in Mauritania and prefers to talk about "the consequences of slavery." Arrests, and prosecutions are inexistent and there seems to be a lack of political will to apply the law.

18. (SBU) Government agencies involved in efforts to combat sex and labor trafficking include the following: the Ministry of Social Affairs, Family and Childhood's Childhood Department; the Ministry of Justice through the Direction of the Judiciary Protection of Children; the Ministry of the Interior through the Special Brigade for Minors; and the Labor Department. There is currently no dedicated agency focusing on trafficking and it is rare that investigators, inspectors, judges, social workers, etc. specialize in trafficking. In November 2009, the government created a Road Security Agency in charge of combating all forms of trafficking, illegal immigration, and terrorist activities in Mauritanian roads. Nevertheless, the agency is not yet operational and it is still unclear what its practical role will be or how it plans to coordinate its work with police and gendarmerie.

19. (SBU) The government has stated it is willing to take action but does not have the necessary resources to fund training for police, gendarmerie, and social workers, or provide help to victims (Ref E). The government is also unable to fight trafficking more effectively because laws are frequently not enforced. Investigations are rare and prosecutions virtually nonexistent. As for the slavery question, the government minimizes the problem of "slavery," preferring to talk about the "consequences of slavery." As a

result, it focuses preferentially on development programs (such as the Program for the Eradication of the Consequences of Slavery) to improve the conditions of communities of former slaves rather than on programs to prosecute slave-masters, investigate allegations of slavery, provide assistance to runaway slaves and raise awareness among the population about the anti-slavery law -- both among slaves and masters.

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10. (SBU) No systematic monitoring of anti-trafficking efforts or assessments are performed.

11. (SBU) In 1996, the government passed laws 96-019 and 96-020 creating a civil registry system and stating that it is mandatory to declare all births. According to the MICS report published in May 2008, only 56 percent of births of children under 5 years old are registered. The Southern regions of Hodh Echarghi and Hodh El Garbi had the lowest registration rates; mostly due to lack of understanding on the part of the population about the importance of registering children. Post has first-hand knowledge of cases in which slavery victims do not have birth certificates or identity papers.

12. (SBU) The government's capacity to gather the data required for an in-depth assessment of law enforcement efforts is limited.

INVESTIGATION AND PROSECUTION OF TRAFFICKERS

13. (SBU) Existing Laws against TIP: In addition to already existing laws, the government adopted on January 22, 2009, a new law relating to the Illicit Traffic of Migrants. This law calls for 5-10 years imprisonment and a 5-10 million UM (\$18,500 to \$37,000) fine for those involved in trafficking

of migrants. It also establishes a 2-4 year imprisonment and a 500,000 to 1 million UM (\$1,851 to \$3,700) fine to anyone giving anyone else instructions to engage in the trafficking of migrants. This law states that victims of trafficking cannot be prosecuted for trafficking, illegal residence or entry, or possession of illegal travel documents. It also provides for the extradition of traffickers and for judiciary cooperation among other countries.

¶14. (SBU) Punishment of Sex Trafficking Offenses: Law 025/2003 on Trafficking in Persons states that anyone "exploiting prostitutes or engaging in other forms of sexual exploitation can be sentenced to 5-10 years of forced labor and a 500,000 - 1 million UM fine." The penal code has also dispositions against prostitution and pandering.

¶15. (SBU) Punishment of Labor Trafficking Offenses: The punishment for those engaging in labor trafficking offenses according to law 025/2003 on Trafficking in Persons is 5-10 years of forced labor and a 500,000 - 1 million UM (\$1,851 to \$3,700) fine. The labor code has other dispositions against labor offenses.

¶16. (SBU) Prescribed penalties for rape: The penal code states that rapists who are single men face forced labor and flagellation. Married rapists could be subject to the death penalty. Nevertheless, please note that these penalties are rarely applied (the death penalty has not been applied for any crime in several decades).

¶17. (SBU) Law Enforcement Statistics: According to the Ministry of Justice, there were no investigations, prosecutions, convictions or sentences imposed in 2009. According to SOS Esclaves, judges refused to investigate, neither on slavery nor on child abuse grounds, two child slavery cases brought to them in 2009 (Ref F). An informal agreement was reached outside the court and the children remained with their slave-masters.

¶18. (SBU) Law Enforcement Training: The government does not provide any specialized training for law enforcement and immigration officials on identifying and treating victims of trafficking. The Government has sought assistance in establishing specialized units for this purpose.

¶19. (SBU) Cooperation with other governments: post is not aware of any instances of cooperation with other governments to investigate or prosecute trafficking cases.

¶20. (SBU) Post has no knowledge of extraditions of traffickers.

¶21. (SBU) There is no evidence of government involvement in trafficking. Nevertheless, anti-slavery activists accuse judges and local authorities such as governors and county administrators of tacit complicity. The 2007 slavery law has yielded no prosecutions and most slavery cases brought to judges are settled outside courts and promptly filed away. They argue the authorities, who are White Moors for the most part, are part of the establishment and are reluctant to go (TIP) REPORT

against their own class as slavery is intimately linked to White Moor "privilege."

¶22. (SBU) No officials have been investigated or prosecuted for involvement in trafficking. No administrative sanctions have been applied to judges or officials who do not pay due attention to slavery cases.

¶23. (SBU) Mauritania does not contribute troops to international peacekeeping operations.

¶24. (SBU) No sex tourism problems have been identified.

PROTECTION AND ASSISTANCE TO VICTIMS

¶25. (SBU) The government has no programs providing protection to victims and witnesses beyond that stated on Para. 26.

¶26. (SBU) The Childhood Department created in 2007 the National Center for the Protection of Children in Difficulty located in the El Mina and Dar Naim districts of Noaukchott. In 2009, the center provided shelter to 270 children, 60 of whom were talibe. This center returns children to their families or to their imams asking for guarantees that the children will not be sent back to the streets to beg. It also places children in surrogate families when necessary. The government did not provide information on resources it devotes to this center.

¶27. (SBU) Government provided access to legal and medical services is extremely limited. Most victim services are provided by NGOs.

¶28. (SBU) Post has no knowledge of the government assisting foreign trafficking victims.

¶29. (SBU) The government does not provide long term shelter or housing benefits to victims.

¶30. (SBU) The government does not have a referral process to transfer victims detained, arrested or placed in protective custody by law enforcement authorities to institutions that provide short- or long-term care.

¶31. (SBU) There are no official numbers of trafficking victims. A 2006 study by the Association des Enfants et developpement en Mauritanie identified 300 talibe children in Nouakchott. Association Femmes Chefs de Famille has assisted 50 girls trafficked to Saudi Arabia. NGOs interviewed for the 2010 study on Child trafficking and worst forms of labor had assisted 89 children victims of slavery. There are no statistics concerning the number of victims of slavery or the number of women in domestic servitude. Victims were mostly assisted by NGOs.

¶32. (SBU) The government's law enforcement, immigration, and social services personnel do not have a formal system of proactively identifying victims of trafficking among high-risk persons with whom they come in contact.

¶33. (SBU) Illegal migrants are detained and placed in the Nouadhibou Migrant Detention Center until their expulsion from Mauritania. Women suspected of prostitution are often jailed.

¶34. (SBU) The government does not encourage victims to assist in the investigation and prosecution of trafficking. There are no precedents of victims filing civil suits or seeking legal action against traffickers. In slavery cases, civil society representatives claim that judges attempt to broker informal agreements between the masters and disgruntled slaves. Cases are often dropped and investigations are rarely conducted.

¶35. (SBU) No specialized training in identifying trafficking victims has been provided. Nevertheless, in January 2009, the government provided training to judges in Nouadhibou about the consequences of Mauritania being a signatory of international human rights conventions, including trafficking.

¶36. (SBU) The government collaborated with UNICEF and the government of the United Arab Emirates in the repatriation and compensation of 463 Mauritanian child jockeys trafficked to the UAE between 1992 and 2005. This program ended in 2008 (TIP) REPORT

but it was followed by a 1 million USD program aimed at increasing capacity among the communities where the child jockeys hailed from.

¶37. (SBU) Terre des Hommes will assist in the repatriation

of children from West Africa victims of trafficking. UNICEF conducts studies and ran the child jockey program. Other local NGOs include Association Femmes Chefs de Famille, AMDH, SOS Esclaves, AMSME and ALCD

PREVENTION

138. (SBU) In 2009, the government conducted an awareness campaign in conjunction with civil society about the plight of domestic workers. It also conducted an awareness campaign on the 2007 law against slavery as part of the PESE program in the Brakna, Gorgol and Assaba regions.

139. (SBU) The government does not monitor immigration and emigration patterns for evidence of trafficking.

140. (SBU) There is no mechanism for coordination and communication between various agencies, internal, international, and multilateral on trafficking-related matters, such as a multi-agency working group or a task force.

141. (SBU) The government is currently working in association with the International Organization for the Right to Development (IDDLO) to draft a National Action Plan to Fight Trafficking in Persons to be released in 2010.

142. (SBU) Prostitution is prohibited in Mauritania and is a taboo. Other than arresting women suspected of being prostitutes, no other measures have been taken.

143. (SBU) The government has taken no measures during the reporting period to reduce the participation in international child sex tourism by nationals of the country.

144. (SBU) Mauritania currently has no military or police deployed in peacekeeping operations.

PARTNERSHIPS

145. (SBU) The government has worked in close collaboration with UNICEF in implementing programs such as the repatriation of child jockeys as well as conducting studies. The UN Special Rapporteur visited Mauritania in November 2009 at the government's invitation. The government is currently working with for the Right to Development (IDDLO) to draft an Action Plan. In December 2009, the government responded favorably and rapidly to a request by Embassy Nouakchott to deny entry into Mauritanian territory to a Malian trafficker attempting to enter Mauritania with a group of talibe children.

146. (SBU) No international assistance is provided by the Mauritanian government to other countries.

HEROES: AMINETOU MINT MOCTAR

147. (SBU) Mrs. Aminetou Mint Moctar is a dynamic human rights activist well-known for her dedication and commitment to assisting girls and women victims of trafficking as well as raising awareness with the government and the public about the plight of women victims of trafficking. In 2009, Mrs. Mint Moctar spearheaded highly visible public campaigns to denounce trafficking to Saudi Arabia of young Mauritanian girls as well as the exploitation of Mauritanian and West African women living in domestic servitude. Her actions have brought the government to recognize these practices exist. She has consistently fought for these women -- whose voices are not heard in Mauritanian society -- to create a legal framework to protect victims and fight impunity. Mrs. Mint Moctar has also been a vocal opponent of the traditional practice of early marriages, which increases girls' chances of being trafficked, or sexually exploited. Mrs. Mint Moctar

heads the Association Femmes Chefs de Familles, which she founded in 1990 and provides assistance to victims of domestic violence, rape and/or slavery. For her work with these sensitive and often taboo issues, Aminetou Mint Moctar has been accused of being a bad Muslim and a traitor to her (TIP) REPORT

country. She has also received innumerable threats. In light of Mauritania's fall to Tier 3 in the Department of State's Annual Trafficking in Persons Report for 2009, her work on trafficking - saving girls, spearheading conferences to spread the message about the mechanics of typical trafficking operation in Mauritania, inviting the media to cover these issues, has heightened awareness of the phenomenon on a national and international level.

CONTACT INFORMATION

¶48. (SBU) Any questions regarding this report should be addressed to Nitza Sola-Rotger, Political Officer, sola-rotgern@state.gov

BOULWARE